



SACRAMENTO - SAN JOAQUIN  
**DELTA CONSERVANCY**

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## Consideration of a Phased Approach to the Board's Strategic Planning Process

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**Requested Action:** Appoint a committee to advise staff in the Board's strategic planning efforts and direct staff to proceed with organizing and securing necessary resources for the organizational work and strategic planning processes.

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### **Background**

The Delta Conservancy Board is required by statute to complete and adopt a strategic plan within two years after hiring its executive officer (Public Resources Code Section 32376). The strategic plan will guide the vision, mission, and objectives of the Conservancy over the next three to five years. Under Section 32376, the strategic plan will be developed in cooperation with various stakeholders through an open, public process. The plan will be designed to address the Conservancy's role and proposed actions regarding land use, recreation, water and flood management, and habitat conservation and protection within the legal Delta.

The strategic plan shall also establish priorities and criteria for projects and programs, based upon an assessment of program requirements, resources, and funding needs throughout the Delta. Finally, the statute requires that the Conservancy's strategic plan be consistent with the Delta Plan, the Delta Protection Commission's Resource Management Plan, the Central Valley Flood Protection Plan, the Suisun Marsh Preservation Act of 1977, and the Habitat Management, Preservation, and Restoration Plan for the Suisun Marsh (Public Resources Code Sec. 32376). Two of these plans—the Delta Plan and the Flood Protection Plan—are not yet completed.

At its August 4, 2010, meeting, the Delta Conservancy Board expressed its intention to begin working on the strategic plan sooner rather than later, regardless of the hiring status for the executive officer.

Over the last month, Conservancy staff have met with representatives from several state agencies and other organizations regarding approaches for setting up the strategic planning process. A frequent comment was that the statutory requirements for the Conservancy's strategic plan are daunting; consequently, Conservancy staff recommends taking a phased approach—one that includes a staff-developed organizational work plan—to accomplish this task.

## **Strategic Planning**

“A goal without a plan is just a wish.”

--Larry Elder, the Sage of South Central

*Importance.* Strategic Planning is defined as a long-term, future-oriented process of assessment, goal setting, and strategy building that maps an explicit path between an organization's present status and a vision of its future. An effective strategic plan carefully considers the organization's capabilities and environment, and these considerations lead to priority-based resource allocation and other decisions. It is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an agency is, what it does, and why it does the things it does.

Because strategic planning is a team effort that builds the future direction of an organization's actions, the process itself is quite important.

Strategic planning will allow the Conservancy to:

- Prepare for contingencies that could prevent the Conservancy from attaining its co-equal responsibilities and statutory mandates,
- Prepare a framework for the Conservancy's orderly growth and progress,
- Have a strategy to allocate resources in a manner that allows the Conservancy to meet its goals.

The four basic questions that the strategic planning process helps an organization answer are:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?
- How do we get there?
- How do we measure our progress?

Effective strategic planning considers the needs of stakeholders, including policy-makers, in defining missions, goals, and performance measures.

Because the strategic planning process is so important and will take considerable time, Conservancy staff recommends that the Board consider taking a phased approach to completing their strategic plan; this phased approach would include a staff-developed organizational work plan that would be completed before the strategic plan is started. Staff also recommends forming a Strategic Planning Task Force comprised of Board members who will work closely with Conservancy staff throughout the strategic planning process.

*Approach.* The Conservancy's strategic plan must be consistent with at least five other plans (Public Resources Code Sec. 32376). To ensure the success of the Conservancy's programs, it is likely that the strategic plan also will be consistent with the general plans and habitat conservation plans of the five Delta counties as well as other documents, such as the Delta Protection Commission's economic sustainability plan. Funds provided to the Conservancy to implement ecosystem restoration projects pursuant to the Bay Delta Conservation Plan shall only be used for ecosystem restoration purposes (Public Resources Code Sec. 32360(3)). Meeting these statutory requirements will require a large amount of collaboration and coordination.

In addition to meeting those strategic plan requirements, there are other things to consider on the Conservancy's planning horizon: (1) current resources are limited, both in terms of personnel and money; (2) the Conservancy needs to plan for the potential \$2.2 billion in funding that could come to the Conservancy if the water bond is enacted in 2012, and (3) how best to work with the new governor and administration.

As staff talked with various sources, it became clear that the Conservancy needed to consider developing two products: an organizational work plan and a strategic plan. The organizational work plan would provide the broad look at staffing needs and identify potential roles and partnerships for the Conservancy. This work plan will provide the foundation for the strategic plan. Staff believes that the strategic plan will be an on-going process, even after its initial completion, and having the organizational work plan in place would help connect the flexibility and adaptation of the strategic planning process with the foundation of the Conservancy's organization.

Staff recommends a phased approach to the organizational work and strategic planning processes. In the first phase, staff proposes that it develop the work plan for the Conservancy; staff will bring completed work plan elements to the Board for its review and direction. In phase II, staff proposes a short series of focused workshops for the Board, which will allow much needed flexibility considering the members' schedules and provide a broader opportunity for the public to interact with the Board. Subsequently, advisory committee and workshops can be scheduled to focus on specific topic areas if the Board determines that this would be advantageous and result in a well informed strategic plan.

#### Phase I

Staff will develop an organizational work plan, based on the statutory requirements listed in Public Resources Code Sec. 32322. This work plan will identify potential roles, partnerships, available resources, and suggest timelines for agency growth. The focus of this phase is to answer the questions, "How does the Conservancy as an implementing agency fit with the other Delta-focused agencies?", "Who are the likely partners for this Conservancy?", "Given the foreseeable future, what are the staffing needs of the Conservancy?", and "Where are the fiscal resources?" This phase can be accomplished through staff research, interviews with other agencies, and through facilitated staff work meetings. It is anticipated that the staff will bring organizational

work plan elements to the Board for its review and direction as these elements are completed. The rationale is that bringing smaller portions of an organizational work plan to the Board for review will be an effective and efficient use of the Board's time as it begins its strategic planning process.

#### Phase II

The Board members develop the vision, mission, and value statements of the Conservancy. The focus of this phase is to answer the questions, "What does the Conservancy want to be?" "What does the end result look like?" and "What drives the Conservancy's actions?" This phase can be accomplished through a combination of pre-workshop interviews and surveys, conducted and tabulated by a facilitator or facilitating team, and public workshops. The workshops' length could vary, depending upon how much advanced work the Board has time to give. In this phase, the Board may also choose to set priorities for the Conservancy, based upon the organizational work plan and given the broad range of statutory mandates for which it is responsible (Public Resources Code Sec. 32372).

#### Phase III

The Board may establish Strategy Teams to focus on how best to achieve the vision and incorporate the values developed in Phase II for each of the statutorily mandated topics or Board priority. Strategy Teams would consist of Board members and stakeholders. The Strategy Teams would answer the question "How do we get there?" for each of the statutorily mandated topics. This is the phase where goals, objectives, and actions will be vetted and determined based upon the Board's work in Phase II.

#### Phase IV

This is the final phase, and continues to build upon the work from the previous two phases. In this phase, the Strategy Teams will focus on articulating performance measures by which the public and the Conservancy can determine how the organization is proceeding in fulfilling its vision and mission. The questions the teams answer during this phase is, "What does success look like?" and "How do we measure our progress?"

As in Phase II, Phases III and IV would use a combination of surveys and pre-workshop activities in addition to workshops. In these phases, staff proposes that the Board consider using some Web 2.0 features, such as Internet-based large scale surveys or wikis, to assist in developing creative ways to address goals, objectives, and actions. The City of Melbourne, Australia, used the Internet and a wiki<sup>1</sup> to successfully create its general plan "Future Melbourne 2020,"

(<http://www.futuremelbourne.com.au/wiki/view/FMPlan/S1aAboutFutureMelbourne2020>).

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<sup>1</sup> In the [May 2008 issue](#) of [Governing](#) magazine, wikis were described as "a collaboratively edited web page that allows users to edit or add content. Within a government agency, it can be used to allow information to bubble up from all corners, and from people who might never have been invited to attend a meeting but who might have ideas about how to proceed or where to exercise caution." Wikis operate with the understanding that the collective knowledge is greater than what any one person has, and therefore leads to a more comprehensive product.

*Rationale for phased approach.* Staff proposes a phased approach for several reasons; primary among the reasons is the current lack of funding for developing the Conservancy's strategic plan. A phased approach will allow for more time to investigate and secure additional funding from outside sources for this purpose. An advantage of completing the staff-developed organizational work plan first is that the information generated in the work plan can be used in the Conservancy's spring finance letter to the Department of Finance.

A second reason for pursuing a phased approach is the status of the executive officer hiring, which is subject to the state employee hiring freeze. Understandably, there is some concern about moving too far along with the strategic planning process without the benefit of the perspective and expertise of the permanent executive officer, who will be responsible for carrying out the strategic plan.

Thirdly, a phased approach has the potential to allow for flexibility and maximum participation by Board members and stakeholders. Focusing on discrete elements of the strategic plan allows scheduling flexibility and time for participants to incorporate newly-developed information into the next phase of planning. This flexibility and time also allows the Board and stakeholders to work with the transition of administrations that will take place in January 2011.

*Recommendations.* The Delta Conservancy staff recommends that the Board take the following actions.

- **Appoint** an advisory committee to work with staff as they develop the materials and plans for the strategic planning workshops. The expectation is that this advisory committee will provide guidance and feedback to staff as the workshops are developed.
- **Direct** staff to proceed with scheduling the phased organizational work and strategic planning processes. This includes hiring a facilitator or other consultants to develop all materials and provide additional staffing necessary to complete the organizational work plan, workshops, and initial strategic plan. The expectation during the strategic planning process is that staff will provide the Board with all materials at least one week before a workshop, and will provide periodic updates regarding workshop results to the Board at its regularly scheduled meetings.

### **Contact**

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